



Williamsburg Art & Historical Center
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WAH CENTER



Re: Letter of Support for Bienvenido Bones Banez Jr.'s VISA
14, 2021

March

To Whom it May Concern,

I am the Founder and Artistic Director of the not for profit WAH Center (Williamsburg Art and Historical Center) and the Founder of the Yuko Nii Foundation in Brooklyn, New York, USA.

I am writing to you a letter of recommendation in support of Mr. Bienvenido Bones Banez Jr's need of a VISA so that he would be granted return to the United States of America.

I would like to share with you my personal background about why I choose to come to USA and how my long American journey has taken me where I am today so that you would know why I need your kind consideration to help our very talented fellow artist, Bienvenido who went back to his country, the Philippines July, 2019 to visit his aging mother who was suffering a serious health problem, but needs to return to the USA to continue his outstanding career.

Although Japan is a beautiful country with the long history of the rich culture and heritage, and my life at home was rather comfortable and I was blessed to have been brought up by liberal and broad minded parents who had given me security and any support I needed in order to grow. But, thinking of my future to live in Japan, I felt restricted not to be able to explore much wider life- experiences. I felt I needed to live elsewhere. I chose the USA, the land of opportunity and a democratic society where one can exercise one's potential through hard work and perseverance. I was willing to challenge myself to test my abilities. So after studying American and English Literature at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan, in I transferred in 1963 to Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota as a junior student, and earned a BFA Degree in 1965. By then I knew what I wanted in my life. My dream was to be an artist! I moved to New York City, the center of the international art world. I attended Pratt Institute Graduate School in Brooklyn, New York, majoring in painting and minoring in art history, and I earned the MFA degree in 1968. I was extremely happy to find my second home, and New York City became the beloved city to which my heart belonged. The art world in the 1960's and 1970's in New York was dominated by white American male artists. They called it "Male Boys' Club." Experiencing numerous hardships as a foreigner and especially as a Japanese female artists, the door to enter to the New York Art World was impossible. But, nevertheless I kept painting while working as a part time art teacher at a private high school in Manhattan and another part time job teaching woodworking in Brooklyn, New York for 7 years. I started feeling an urgent need to pursue my artist's career seriously, so I quit teaching so that I could concentrate on painting while working as a freelance stage set and costume designer for dance and theater companies, a graphic designer, a printmaker, and a writer for magazines and newspapers. Although my financial situation was quite unstable, I

enjoyed experiencing various creative activities. I met many artists from all over the world who all came to test their talents in this Center of the International Art World. Eventually a small door opened for me to be able to exhibit my art, followed by more opportunities. Through my exhibitions, I met several world-renowned artists who were much older than me but they honored me with their friendship and their spiritual and artistic guidance and were essential in the development of my

ideals and career, especially in the establishment of the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center. They are my mentors and my most respected friends.

In 1996, I founded the not for profit WAH Center (Williamsburg Art and Historical Center) in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York with the idea to support artists who would need a space to exhibit their talents. I quit pursuing my artist's career to dedicate myself totally to the administrative job, so different from my artist life, having faced with a great challenge to overcome many difficulties. As the Artistic Director of the WAH Center, my job has been to oversee all art programs including fine art exhibitions, performing art programs, video presentations, lectures, poetry reading, art related festivals and much more. The WAH Center has produced over 200 art exhibitions with nearly 3500 participants and over 150 performance programs with countless participants, and it has been widely recognized locally, nationally and internationally. Many articles have appeared in the major art magazines and newspapers including the New York Times. The WAH Center has been featured on television and radio. I have received a dozen honorable awards and proclamations from high-ranking government dignitaries including the 2 New York State Governors, 2 New York City Mayors, 3 Brooklyn Borough Presidents and a New York City Council Woman, as well as my alma mater undergraduate and graduate schools' presidents. (Please see my detailed information).

I got to know Bienvenido Banes Banez Jr. who participated in one of the largest International "Surrealist" shows, "Brave Destiny" in 2003, and I was very impressed by his unique painting so that I recommended him to become a member of the WAH Salon Art Club, which is a membership program that offers the members an annual group show. Bien has been exhibiting his works in the annual WAH Salon show ever since for 18 years. Because his vision is totally unique and so different from any others, telling long riveting stories of his inner journeys, one cannot easily keep one's eyes off his work. There is a great mystery which haunts the viewers, and the longer one looks at his work, the deeper meaning one finds. He is not only a quiet spiritual leader in his visual language, but he displays his talent also in music. He composes his music and plays a piano in our performance programs. On top of it all, he is an excellent conversationalist. When the artists get together, he would be the leading man to open up an interesting topic, anything that comes to mind on art, on philosophy, on literature, on religion in which everybody enjoyed the conversation to exchange their ideas with fellow artists.

He has an even temperament with a warm gentle heart. He is an extremely modest and a humble and polite human being. And he is one of the most generous and kindest giving persons I've ever known. The WAH Center depends upon the artists' volunteer spirit, and Bien is one of the most active volunteers. He is always there when we need help. How thankful I am and we all are for his generosity. His

big heart extends in another way in that he has donated over 30 works to the Yuko Nii Foundation Permanent Collection. We treasure his kind gifts and we value his special presence at the WAH Center. Ever since he left for the Philippines in July, 2019, we have been missing him very badly. His artistic and intellectual contribution and his spiritual and humanistic contribution to our fellow artists are truly big and valuable. And I feel strongly his great contribution to the art world and to this country must be recognized. I sincerely hope you will grant Bien the VISA he needs to be able to return to the USA.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely Yours.,

Yuko Nii
Founder & Artistic Director
Williamsburg Art & Historical Center (WAH Center)

Background of Yuko Nii

1) September 8, 1996: Founded the not for profit WAH Center (Williamsburg Art and Historical Center)

The Mission of the WAH Center

In 1996, Yuko Nii purchased a New York City Landmark Kings County Savings Bank and also on the National Register of Historical Places, and she founded the non- profit WAH Center (Williamsburg Art & Historical Center) based upon her “Bridge Concept.” That concept envisions a multifaceted, multicultural art center whose mission is to coalesce the diverse artistic community, and create a global bridge between local, national and international artists, emerging, mid-career and established artists, and artists of all disciplines. Thus through the international language of art we come to understand each other to create a more peaceful and integrated world. The WAH Center is a force for peace and understanding and its concept is incorporated in its acronym: “WAH” in Japanese means “peace” or “harmony” or “unity.” Yuko Nii also wanted to preserve the WAH Center’s architectural pleasure, a French Second Empire masterpiece built in 1867, a New York City Landmark that is also on the National Register of Historic Places, and she wants to make it a functional part of the cultural community of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York.

2) July 8, 2008: Founded the not for profit Yuko Nii Foundation YNF

The Mission of the YN Foundation

In 2008 Yuko Nii founded the not for profit Yuko Nii Foundation (YNF).

While the WAH Center's mission is purely to "present" art programs to the public, the mission of the Yuko Nii Foundation is to hold, maintain and preserve the contemporary art and the historical artifacts and properties, including the landmark building, which Yuko Nii purchased in 1996 and later donated to the foundation in 2008. The YNF loans the art and artifacts in its permanent collection to other institutions such as museums, galleries and art organizations for their special exhibitions.

Awards and Proclamations received from High-ranking Government Dignitaries and Yuko Nii's Alma Mater Undergraduate and Graduate Schools' Presidents

- 1) 1997: then New York State Governor George Pataki presented a Proclamation, congratulating on Nii funding the WAH Center which provides innovative programs and exhibitions by turning the historic Kings County Savings Bank into a multi-purpose arts center that serves the need of artists and art aficionados of diverse backgrounds.
- 2) 1998: then Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden awarded Nii one of "Brooklyn's Women of the Year" for her "unparalleled devotion to her art and commitment to the artist community of Williamsburg/Greenpoint." And he said that the WAH Center's activities have resulted in "tremendous cultural & economic activity throughout the northern Brooklyn area, an area recently designated as an 'historic district' and an 'economic development zone.'"
- 3) 2001: then New York State Governor George Pataki awarded Nii one of "New York State's Women of the Year," honoring her as a "Woman of Excellence with Vision and Courage." He also congratulated Nii on turning the historic Kings County Savings Bank into a multipurpose art center that serves the needs of artists and art aficionados of diverse backgrounds.
- 4) 2003: then Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz presented Nii "The Betty Smith Arts Award" for her dedication to the preservation of the rich artistic and cultural community of Brooklyn
- 5) 2003: then New York City Council-woman Tracy Boyland presented Nii "The "Outstanding Citizen Award" for her being worthy of the esteem of both the community and the great City of New York.
- 6) 2008, during Asian Heritage Month then Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz presented Nii "The Asian Cultural Award" for her

“dynamic leadership and demonstrating outstanding commitment to the betterment of our community.”

7) 2008, Official Brooklyn Historian, John Manbeck, praised Nii, stating in the Brooklyn Eagle: “Art in Williamsburg has made great strides. In fact, all Williamsburg has progress undoubtedly because of its attraction to artists. Much of the credit must be placed on the doorstep of the director of the Williamsburg Art and Historical Center, Yuko Nii. The Center operates out of the former Kings County Savings Bank Building (1867) and celebrated and infusion of a \$500,000 capital funding grant from the city.”

http://www.brooklyneagle.com/categories/category.php?category_id=23&id=22230

8) 2009: then New York State Governor David Paterson named Nii one of New York States’ “Women of the Year” and awarded her for “being an influential role

model who made historical contributions to the growth and the strength of the nation.” (No photo attached).

9) 2009, then New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg presented Nii a proclamation on the occasion of her “Women Forward” art exhibit, recognizing “the invaluable contributions of women artists by broadening women’s opportunities in the arts and creating new possibilities

10) 2011, then Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz presented “Proclamation” congratulating Nii on the success of the important fundraising event, “Artists Rescue Team for Japan” for the victims of Earthquakes, Tsunami and Fukushima’ nuclear plant in Japan on March 11, 2011 and thanking for allowing all to enjoy the vast richness of the arts community and raise a culturally-aware family.

11) 2012, then Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz congratulated Nii on “The 16th Anniversary Grand Harvest Celebration, stating “The WAH’s local, national and international programs have inspired, educated and entertained the public at large, and have demonstrated how a single organization can play a transformative role. It is due to the many outstanding organizations such as the WAH Center that Brooklyn now stands as the cultural capital of the nation.”

12) 2013, Nii’s Alma Mater Graduate School, then Pratt Institute President Dr. Thomas. F Schutte and the Office of Alumni Relations

awarded Nii “Pratt Institute’s 2013 Alumni Achievement Award”, specifically the “Community Commitment Award” as one of the Pratt Institute’s outstanding graduates who have “distinguished themselves in their fields, having earned a high degree of respect among their colleagues and the general community, and whose impact has been felt on a regional, national or international level.”

13) 2016: Nii’s Alma Mater Undergraduate College, Macalester College President Dr. Brian Rosenberg honored Nii “The Distinguished Citizen Award” recognizing alumni who have exercised leadership in civic, social, religious, and professional activities

She is listed in Marquis “Who’s Who in America”, “Who’s Who of American Women”, “Who’s Who in the World.”